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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/16): EGYPTIAN PROPOSAL -
"FASTEST WAY TO SAVE GAZA"

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Main Stories:

All papers lead with the escalation of violence in Gaza and report on January 15 as "the bloodiest day" in the war, as Israeli strikes kill 71 Palestinians and injure 300 others, bringing the estimated Palestinian death toll to 1,105. All front pages report on the killing of " Hamas Interior Minister" Said Siam in an Israeli air strike that killed dozens, including his family and Hamas' security chief Salih Abu Shraykh. Al Quds adds that Israel "targeted" the UNRWA compound, two hospitals and a building with media offices in Gaza City, whereas Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida use a more neutral verb, reporting that the sites were "hit". Al Ayyam further adds that the Israeli army carried out the strikes while trying to advance into downtown Gaza City.

The three papers run the same lead photo of the raging fire inside the Gaza City UNRWA compound warehouse, filled with food and medicine. Al Quds runs another photo of a Gaza medical team holding an Israeli shell that was fired on January 15 onto the Jerusalem hospital in Gaza. Accompanying reporting notes that the shelling caused panic and "mass fleeing" of the injured and sick, as others struggled to evacuate newborns and those too sick to move to the outside streets. Al Hayat Al Jadida inserts into the lead photo, a smaller photo of "martyr Said Siam," the " Hamas Interior Minister." Al Quds and Al Ayyam allocate separate front page space with photos, to Siam's "assassination."

In coverage of the USQ Al Ayyam's front page cites DPA in reporting that the US has decided to cut back on loan guarantees to Israel because of Israeli West Bank settlement policy. The paper comments that the US decision has already been made, but will only be

communicated to Israel after the presidential inauguration. In other new, Al Quds' front page cites AFP in reporting that the Pentagon is drawing up plans for the accelerated withdrawal of troops from Iraq, in order to have plans ready for President Obama's review when he assumes office.

Secretary State Rice is, "worried" and called Israeli leaders to express, "deep concern" over the humanitarian situation in Gaza, according to an inside report in Al Ayyam that cites AFP. State Department spokesman McCormack is also quoted saying, "we are working very hard to reach a ceasefire that is permanent and not limited." Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Ayyam's front pages and Al Quds' inside page, report in neutral language that Israeli Foreign Minister Livni will travel on January 16 to Washington to sign a US assistance agreement to combat arms smuggling to Hamas. The papers report that Secretary Rice told Israel that the US can assist in combating arms smuggling and the papers' remind readers that Israel is demanding that smuggling must be disrupted before arms arrive into Gaza, possibly through pressure on Iran and the targeting of transit points, for example, in Sudan.

In front page coverage of the international response to escalating military operations in Gaza, the three papers report "shock and anger" on the part of international organizations, including the UN and EU. They further report on a January 15 call by Amnesty International to launch an independent investigation into Israeli "war crimes" in Gaza, in light of the attack on UNRWA's Gaza City compound. Al Quds cites AFP in reporting that UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was "furious" and told journalists in Tel Aviv that he demanded from Israeli Defense Minister Barak a full explanation, to which Barak responded that the strike on the compound was a "grave mistake". In separate reporting, Al Quds' front page cites AFP in reporting that the EU Parliament adopted on January 15, a decision,

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"condemning Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians as a violation of international humanitarian law."

In ceasefire efforts' coverage, the three front pages quote a senior Egyptian diplomat stating in Cairo on January 15 that Israel has accepted the Egyptian proposal for a ceasefire. What remains, according to the diplomat, is the scheduling of meetings to decide on how to implement the proposal. Al Ayyam adds that Israel has denied agreeing to the proposal. In separate reporting, Al Ayyam's front page cites Reuters in reporting that Hamas offered Israel, via Egyptian mediators, a one-year truce if Israel agrees to withdraw from the Gaza Strip in one week and reopens Gaza crossings.

In coverage of official Palestinian statements, all front pages quote Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas during a January 15 press conference with German Foreign Minister Steinmeier in Ramallah, stating that the next few hours would be "decisive" for reaching a ceasefire in Gaza. Abbas would not elaborate, but added that there are developments that he hoped would prove positive. He also revealed that there is a five-point Chinese proposal for a ceasefire. Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida front page statements by PA Prime Minister Fayyad announcing in Ramallah on January 15 that the PA will seek a UN resolution under article VII of the UN charter, to stop "the Israeli war on Gaza." Fayyad also noted that the PA will seek international protection for all Palestinians, beyond current international commitments to monitor the Rafah Gaza-Egypt crossing.

In coverage of Arab summits, Al Quds' front page runs statements by a Qatari official that the planned January 16 Doha summit will proceed, regardless of the number of states attending. Al Ayyam's and Al Hayat Al Jadida's front pages report on the January 15 Gulf summit, noting that it further diminished support for the Qatari summit. The papers add that the Gulf summit led to agreement on working towards the success of the January 19 Arab economic summit in Kuwait, at which, according to Kuwaiti Emir Al Ahmad, the situation in Gaza will be among the top agenda items. Finally, the papers report that Saudi Foreign Minister Al Faisal told journalists that Gulf States on January 15 decided to allocate "generous" assistance to the Palestinians.

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds' editorial is titled, "Bombing the UNRWA compound during the Ban Ki Moon-Livni meeting" (01/16): "Is it a coincidence that the Israeli bombing of the UNRWA compound in Gaza coincided with the UN Secretary General's visit to the region?...the bombing is clear evidence... that Israel does not care about the international community ['s will] represented by the UN and its Secretary General.

All that Israel cares about is... seeking to reestablish its capability for deterrence that it lost in Lebanon in 2006... Ban Ki Moon was the recipient of the news of the bombing of the UNRWA compound in Gaza. He must have understood the Israeli message, but responding to that message might not be within his purview, since that response will come from the people of the world who are denouncing this aggression and demanding [the conflict] end immediately and unconditionally."

2) Rajab Abu Sirriyah editorializes in Al Ayyam under the title, "The Egyptian proposal is the fastest way to save Gaza": (01/16) "The Hamas leadership and its delegation in Cairo have been pushed to understand that the Egyptian proposal is the fastest way to stop the insane Israeli war on Gaza. Until now, they have not given their explicit endorsement of the initiative, apparently waiting for the Israeli endorsement first... one could say that political

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naivet and the effect of negative, opposition forces exploiting internal Palestinian [division]... have caused the death of all these victims, since this was all avoidable had the opening of the Rafah crossing on the basis of the 2005 agreements been accepted a year and a half ago, and had a serious... vigorous process been employed to arrange internal affairs."

WALLES